Missouri

As states raise their expectations for what students should know and be able to do, they are also focusing on making sure that teachers are prepared to help children reach higher standards.

In Missouri, the state had put in place an evaluation system for practicing teachers that defined the competencies teachers should demonstrate. State officials wanted to ensure that teacher preparation programs developed the same competencies, so that they were producing “learner-ready teachers.”

Missouri began to transform educator preparation by stepping back and asking what kind of graduates its teacher preparation programs should produce.

“Five years back, we started with rooms of 150 people, and asked, ‘What is the ideal teacher?’” recalls Paul Katnik, the assistant commissioner of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. “We developed teaching standards. From there, we designed preparation standards and assessments. All in an effort to be sure that the world of preparation and practice were closely aligned.”

At first, higher education was a reluctant partner in this effort, says David Hough, the dean of the college of education at Missouri State University. “While higher ed had been in the meetings, they didn’t feel their voice was heard. Changes were being foisted upon them,” he says.

The state’s participation in the Network for Transforming Educator Preparation (NTEP) helped ease those tensions. Leaders from higher education and K-12 have worked closely together, and have recognized that they share the same goals, he says. The state has made some strides, and although they still have more to do, they can already see results.

“We’re beginning to hear that more and more schools are pleased with the quality of teachers coming in,” says Katnik. “We heard the opposite a couple years back—schools were concerned about the quality of candidates.”

About NTEP

The Network for Transforming Educator Preparation is a network of states that are using policy levers identified in Our Responsibility, Our Promise—specifically, licensure, program approval, and data collection, analysis, and reporting—to reinvent educator preparation.

These network states work with educators, preparation programs, institutions of higher education, non-profit and for-profit education providers, districts and schools to make substantive changes in the policy and practice of educator workforce preparation.
Raising the Bar for Teachers

Working with other states in NTEP, Missouri officials reviewed their licensure system for new teachers and determined that their main goal was to ensure that the standards were the same for all programs—university programs and alternative routes for nontraditional candidates alike. “We want to be sure all candidates we give a certificate to at the state level meet the same requirements,” says Katnik.

One of those requirements is a performance assessment, custom-developed for the state by the Educational Testing Service. The online assessment measures candidates’ practices during their student-teaching stint and includes a video component.

Missouri also has a two-tier licensure system. Teachers who complete a preparation program receive initial certification. They must teach for four years, including two with a mentor, complete 30 hours of professional development, participate in a Beginning Teacher Assistance Program, and participate in a performance-based evaluation to receive career certification.

Asking More of Preparation Programs

Much of the work in Missouri has been around the approval of preparation programs. In the past, like many states, Missouri officials reviewed programs about every seven years and determined whether they met state standards. While that system provided assurances that the programs were adequate, it did little to provide guidance to the programs about what they needed to do to improve, notes Hough.

After developing the standards and aligning content assessments and performance assessments to those standards, the state created an annual performance report (APR) for each institution that graded them on factors such as the grade-point averages and test scores of graduates. That report, which officials now call APR 1.0, simply indicated whether the programs met, or did not meet, state goals.

For the next version, known as APR 1.5, the state used the same indicators, but graded the programs on a five-point scale on each of them. In that way, institutions could see where they were on the continuum toward excellence and strengthen areas that needed it. “That’s more of a continuous improvement approach,” says Hough.

Now the state is looking to revise the APR again. This time, officials are considering looking at a much broader set of factors of program quality. As part of their discussions, the state officials are re-examining their teaching standards to see whether they can measure how well preparation programs are developing the characteristics of effective teachers.

That’s a challenge, says Katnik. “We struggled with it in K-12, when we developed teacher evaluation,” he says. “How do you know someone is going to be a good teacher? Does a good score on the content assessment mean you are going to be a good teacher?”

One tool the state is using is the Missouri Educator Profile, which identifies the dispositions of effective teachers. It is used as a diagnostic tool in teacher-preparation programs, and provides information about who might be an effective teacher. APR 2.0 could include a measure of how well institutions have developed these dispositions in their students, Hough says. “We think in teacher education, our job should be to help people develop the traits of an effective teacher.”

Officials are also looking at measures of partnerships between preparation programs and school districts for clinical placements. Currently, the state requires a minimum of 12 weeks of student teaching, and some institutions are providing longer placements. The state is looking into whether a measure of these placements could become part of the program-approval process. “That’s the time in preparation the teacher-candidate learns the most,” Katnik says of the time prospective teachers spend in K-12 classrooms, working with students. “We want to be sure we take advantage of it to its fullest.”

Missouri State is one institution that has moved to year-long residencies for some of its programs, and the move has been transformative, says Hough. “In the old model, you had a student teacher placed in classrooms with a cooperating teacher supervised by the university,” he says. “Today, interns are working with a master teacher under a teacher in residence. They are learning on the job.”
The program-approval measures and data issues that Missouri is tackling are high on the agenda of NTEP. And Missouri officials are pleased to be able to work on these challenges with their colleagues from other states.

“It’s difficult going at the work alone. Doing it with others, it’s been tremendous,” says Katnik. “There’s collaboration among the states. You don’t have to figure it all out from scratch.”

Within the state, participation in NTEP has also strengthened the collaboration among the state’s educators, adds Hough. “When Missouri decided to join the NTEP initiative, we put together a team from three sides of a house—higher ed, P-12 (state department and employers), and associations and teacher groups,” Hough says. “We brought them all together to the table. There were skeptics. Today, one year later, the skeptics are all close friends working together, all on same page.”

The Role of the Network

3 Using Data to Measure Success

In developing the next version of the annual performance report, Missouri officials are wrestling with the challenges of collecting and reporting data that in some cases are difficult to produce. One particular challenge is using student growth data from practicing teachers and tying them back to the teachers’ preparation programs.

“Everybody wants to do it,” says Hough. “The question is, how reliable and valid are data on student growth? Every statistician will say it’s problematic.”

The challenge is particularly acute in Missouri, where many programs are small, he adds. Collecting data from a relatively small number of teachers risks violating their privacy rights, Hough notes.

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— David Hough
Dean, College of Education
Missouri State University